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Interagency Conflict Making Espionage Probe a 'Mess'

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The government investigation of espionage charges against U.S. Marine security guards is "a mess" because of interagency conflicts and problems with the initial interrogation of a primary suspect, a knowledgeable administration official said yesterday.

Another informed official said the issue of providing immunity from prosecution to some guards in return for their testimony is being hotly debated within the administration.

The allegations came as the Marine Corps began its first judicial hearings in the expanding security scandal, which has led to the arrest of three Marines on espionage charges and one for allegations of improper fraternization. In addition, at least 40 Marine guards have been recalled from their posts throughout the world in connection with the investigation.

Sgt. Clayton J. Lonetree, 25, appeared before a military investigating officer in a daylong Article 32 hearing at Quantico Marine Base yesterday that will determine whether the military has enough evidence to charge him formally with espionage and other offenses. Lonetree, while serving as a Marine guard at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, was allegedly a central figure in major security breaches.

Lonetree, whose admissions of sexual relations with a Soviet woman at the embassy sparked the worldwide investigation, is accused of allowing Soviet agents access to sensitive areas of the U.S. embassy in Moscow. He allegedly was lured into cooperating with the agents by the Soviet woman, who worked at the embassy.

The administration official who said the investigation is "a mess" also said the probe is being hampered by the "institutional resistance" of conflicting government agencies trying to protect their interests. Agencies with a role in the investigation include the State Department, Defense Department, Navy Investigative Service, Marine Corps and Central Intelligence Agency. In addition, the chief of the Justice Department's internal security section has been providing informal advice to the military investigators, according to officials.

Marine spokesman Lt. Col. John M. Shotwell said reports indicate that the agencies are "all working pretty closely together" but added, "perhaps there's been some communication problems."

Another administration source said yesterday that investigators "are having difficulty putting together a case." The official added, "The initial questioning of [Lonetree] was probably less than carefully done from a law enforcement standpoint."

Marine Corps officials said yesterday they could not comment on the allegations because the actual investigation has been conducted by the Naval Investigative Service (NIS). The Navy also declined to comment.

One official said that White House national security adviser Frank C. Carlucci has proposed giving immunity to Lonetree or his partner at the Moscow embassy, Cpl. Arnold Bracy, who also has been charged with espionage. Carlucci reportedly made the recommendation so that the administration could conduct a "damage assessment" of how badly security at the embassy was compromised, the source said.

The official said the suggestion was vigorously opposed by the Justice Department, which has the right to prosecute the Marine guards if the military declines.

"I just can't imagine that one of the most serious espionage cases of the century would be let go so we could do a damage assessment," said one administration official. An administration official declined to comment on Carlucci's role.

The Article 32 hearing on the espionage and fraternization charges against Lonetree will continue today in a secure room described as a "vault" in the basement of an administration building at Quantico. A similar hearing on the charges against Bracy will begin today.

Michael V. Stuhff and William M. Kunstler, civilians representing Lonetree, said yesterday that the case against their client was flawed from the outset. Kunstler, who had previously released copies of statements that Lonetree made to Navy investigators in late December, said the statements should be suppressed in court because there were large gaps between the time the agents gave Lonetree warning of his constitutional rights and the time the statements were taken.

In one instance, Lonetree signed a statement of rights on Dec. 24 in Vienna, but the statement that followed was dated Dec. 26, Kunstler said. Kunstler also charged that the statement consisted of paraphrases and was inaccurate.

Stuhff and Kunstler said the State Department had focused much of attention on the trial because, as Stuhff alleged, "there are a lot of bureaucrats trying to protect their careers." Stuhff said some of the security problems at the embassy "border on criminal" violations.

In a related matter, a military court of appeals yesterday denied a request that Staff Sgt. Robert S. Stufflebeam be released from "house arrest" at Quantico, where he is being held on charges of fraternization with Soviet women at the Moscow embassy. Stufflebeam, 24, was the deputy commander of the guard unit at the embassy while Lonetree and Bracy were assigned to the post.

Meanhile, Sen. Lawton Chiles (D-Fla.), chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, yesterday released a National Bureau of Standards report on the new U.S. Embassy in Moscow, which warns that "important deficiencies" in the construction must be corrected to assure adequate safety standards before the building is occupied. It did not attempt to address the question of repairs that might be required because of Soviet-implanted eavesdropping devices.

Officials estimated the repairs would cost $1.1 million at Washington prices, and an addititional $341,000 for other suggested remedial measures.

Staff writers Molly Moore and David Ottaway contributed to this report.

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